Texas Tech University

Undergraduate elementary teacher preparation pilot inspection report

Inspection Dates: April 7-11, 2014

This inspection was carried out by the Teacher Preparation Inspectorate in accordance with the Teacher Preparation Pilot Handbook.

The inspection draws upon evidence from the faculty, program and schools visited during the pilot inspection. This evidence has enabled inspectors to make judgements against all parts of the inspection rubric.

**Inspection judgements**

*Key to judgements: Grade 4 is strong; grade 3 is good; grade 2 is needs improvement; grade 1 is inadequate*

**Undergraduate elementary education program**

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Texas Tech University undergraduate elementary education program

Information about the program

- 359 undergraduate students are enrolled in the program to obtain certification as elementary school teachers in Texas. Students in the program are in these areas: EC-6 Generalist, EC-6 Generalist with ESL Supplemental, EC-6 Generalist with Bilingual Supplemental, and EC-6 Generalist with Special Education Supplemental.
- To enter the program, undergraduates must have a minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.75 in all previous college courses (most selected students have an entering GPA of 3.0 or above).
- Most EC-6 degree plan students at Texas Tech complete 44 credit hours of general education courses (English, history, mathematics, political science, science, music, social/behavioral science). They also take eight courses in elementary education subject areas. The remainder of the program in organized in four blocks: Blocks I and II combine coursework with one full day per week of fieldwork for two semesters; Blocks III and IV take place over two semesters and include four days per week of student teaching plus coursework.
- Texas Tech University (TTU) student teachers are placed for their clinical experiences in public schools and districts located in and around Lubbock. The program has formal memoranda of understanding (MOU) with its school district partners, addressing selection of mentor teachers as well as cooperative efforts to collect and analyse data on candidate and graduate performance. Texas Tech works with its partner stakeholders to review the impact of teacher candidates on student learning outcomes.

Information about the elementary teacher preparation program pilot inspection

- The inspection team observed teacher candidates in Lubbock and Lubbock Cooper school districts. Inspectors were present when teacher candidates received feedback from their university supervising teachers.
- Inspectors attended or observed videos of the following TTU academic classes: Children’s Literature, Student Teaching Course, Behavior Management, Exceptional Children and Youth, Teaching Mathematics, Foundations of Reading/Language and Literacy Acquisition, Teaching Social Studies, Teaching Science, Teaching Content Areas ESL/BIL, and Introduction to Teaching (Assessment). Some courses were taught on elementary school sites.
- Inspectors conducted interviews or focus group meetings with recent program graduates now employed as teachers; with principals and district administrators at two school district partnership meetings and on school sites; with program site coordinators (among other roles, they function as university supervisors); and with elementary education program faculty.
- The inspection team participated in two regularly scheduled district-program partnership meetings, in Lubbock school district and in Lubbock Cooper school district.
- School administrators described their strategies for placing student teachers with classroom mentors, and explained the relationship between their school and the TTU elementary education program.
The program representatives participated in all formal inspection team meetings, and the College of Education dean also participated in several formal team meetings.

**Inspection team**

Edward Crowe, Lead Inspector  
Michael DeGuire, Inspector  
Katharine (Kayce) Patterson, Inspector  
Audra Watson, Inspector  
David Storrie, Senior Inspector, Tribal Group

**Program representatives**

Dr. Douglas Hamman, Director of Teacher Education Programs  
Dr. Larry Hovey, Coordinator of Accreditation and Assessment, College of Education  
Dr. Peggy Johnson, Vice Dean, College of Education
The key strengths of the elementary program are:

- At least 75% of those admitted to the undergraduate elementary education program have a GPA of 3.0 or better. Admitted students are in the upper half of the national college-going population according to the University ACT profile. The program has written plans and specific activities for strengthening the diversity of the teacher candidate population.
- Coursework in reading and literacy ensures that candidates are prepared to implement scientifically based reading instruction, providing teacher candidates with theoretical and practical knowledge that enables them to promote development of reading skills in their students.
- Faculty instruction in content knowledge and teaching skills promotes effective connections between coursework and real world applications in the K12 classroom.
- The program has an effective process to select and support mentor teachers through strong partnerships with local school districts.
- The design of the program’s candidate development curriculum as well as its observation and feedback processes includes careful attention to training and support for candidates, mentor teachers, and site coordinators; this structure provides good opportunities for guided practice and enables teacher candidates to learn skills that promote successful learning for their students.
- Effective use of data enables program leaders and faculty to monitor program and candidate quality. The program uses this information as the basis for interventions to address problems with candidate performance, placements, and university instruction.

What does the elementary program need to do to improve further?

The program should:

- Improve the quality of selection into the program by:
  - Increasing the minimum GPA required for admission to 3.0 for all candidates.
  - Continuing its efforts to ensure that the pool of enrolled candidates is representative of the student population of schools and districts served by the program.
- Raise the quality of content and teaching skills in mathematics by:
  - Securing better alignment between mathematics content courses and the knowledge for teaching developed through math teaching methods coursework.
  - Giving greater attention in coursework on assessment to develop candidate learning and practice on how to apply formative assessment and modify instruction to build academic skills and learning growth for higher and lower performing groups of P12 students.
- Bring the quality of clinical practice, feedback and candidate performance to strong by:
  - Ensuring consistency among site coordinators in the quality of observation, feedback, and guided practice for teacher candidates.
  - Making sure that rubrics used for candidate performance assessment give greater attention to differentiated instruction, going beyond inclusion to promote the academic achievement of students of all ability levels; and ensuring that performance assessments (classroom observations) have a stronger focus on the K12 student learning taking place in classrooms while candidates are being observed and assessed.
Strengthen the quality of program performance management through:

- Addressing inconsistencies in the quality of observation and feedback from different site coordinators that affect candidate ability to advance the academic progress of all students.
- Giving rigorous attention to the use of data to monitor the effectiveness of program changes in areas such as mathematics instruction, differentiation, and having a stronger focus on student learning in candidate observation and feedback processes.

**Inspection Judgements**

**The quality of selection for teacher candidates:**

1. The quality of selection is rated good. While the College of Education requires a minimum GPA of 2.75 for admission to the program, review of data during inspection on the GPA of all currently enrolled students shows that at least 75% of admitted students had a prior GPA of 3.0 or above.
2. Based on University data about the test scores of admitted students on a nationally normed test (the ACT), admitted students come from the upper half of the college going population.
3. Through recruitment of Hispanic teacher candidates in the Dallas-Fort Worth area as well as an initiative underway to recruit black males into teaching in Lubbock and in Dallas, the program is taking concrete steps to ensure that its candidate demographic profile better matches that of the student population in schools served by the program.
4. Selection into the program is not yet strong because not all students admitted to the elementary education program enter with a GPA of 3.0 or better.

**The quality of content and teaching skills:**

1. Reading instruction provided by the program for teacher candidates is good, providing theoretical and practical knowledge of reading instruction through a sequence of courses that includes attention to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension. Because courses meet in schools, faculty use the opportunity to ensure that these components of reading instruction are addressed through a weekly coursework focus area tied to practice, leading to better preparation of teacher candidates for good reading instruction. One of the formal performance assessments (PA) of teacher candidates is based on a reading lesson, ensuring that candidates obtain specific feedback about their skills in reading instruction.
2. Candidate preparation in classroom management is good as a result of coursework focused on effective strategies for managing behavior and discipline, and by assessment of candidate skills through the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) rubric. Direct observation of candidate teaching during inspection showed that classrooms were orderly, with productive use of time for learning tasks.
3. Supported by program leaders, the faculty have implemented clear connections across the curriculum in multiple ways. One example is the links between literacy and content courses such as science and social studies. Inspection observations and interviews with individual faculty and program leaders indicate this is a result of general faculty commitment to the redesigned program’s goals and outcomes which focus on well-prepared teacher candidates who can advance the learning of their K12 students. As a result, instruction provided to candidates is coherent and helps to build good content knowledge and teaching skills.
4. The program does provide explicit instruction in how to meet the learning needs of bilingual and special education learners. However, teacher candidates do not have sufficient opportunity to learn effective strategies for differentiating instruction for students of varying ability levels. This is not present in coursework, candidate assessment or feedback given through performance assessments. Similarly, while faculty instruction in formative assessment is good and candidates generally demonstrate good ability in this area, coursework does not include enough opportunities to learn and practice how to apply assessment findings by modifying classroom instruction to build skills for higher and lower performing groups of students.

5. Inspectors found evidence that candidates are prepared to teach math effectively. Nonetheless, candidates and faculty agreed that math content coursework should be better connected to strategies that help teacher candidates to learn mathematical knowledge for teaching. Program leaders and faculty had recognized this issue prior to inspection and are taking specific steps aimed at improvement. These developments were underway and it was too soon for inspectors to obtain evidence of their impact.

Quality of clinical placement, feedback and candidate performance:  Good (3)

1. Placement of teacher candidates for student teaching begins prior to the start of the P12 school year, enabling them to observe key aspects of school and teacher preparation for the start of school. Candidates also participate in district professional development activities for teachers. Clinical placements allow candidates to experience three types of school placements that provide them with prolonged opportunities to work in both high and low socio-economic status (SES) schools. This gives candidates the opportunity to practice effectively to meet the learning needs of students in different types of schools. This statement was supported by the comments of teacher candidates and program site coordinators, and by school district officials who seek to employ TTU graduates.

2. Through its partnerships with school districts and individual schools, the program has an effective process for recruiting and selecting mentor teachers for candidate placements. This includes working closely with building principals to identify strong teachers who can work closely with the teacher candidates around the TAP rubric. As a result, candidates have good support for their co-teaching responsibilities with mentor teachers and schools are eager to hire the graduates.

3. The program’s observation and feedback system is good, with well-designed structure that includes training for all observers, use of video throughout the program, and double coding of performance assessments by program faculty to ensure reliability and validity. Program site coordinators are monitored by professional development facilitators (PDFs) and receive ongoing training from them so they can work successfully with teacher candidates and classroom mentor teachers to prepare program graduates to be effective teachers. Moreover there is evidence that the program ensures that mentor teachers not effective in their role are no longer employed in this capacity.

4. The post observation sessions within the Pre Observation Post (POP) cycle provide a good structure for candidate feedback. These sessions clearly delineate areas where candidates need to refine their practice as well as flagging those teaching skills in which the candidate is deemed proficient. While candidates are responsible for bringing student achievement data to these sessions, feedback from program site coordinators gives too little emphasis to the impact of instruction on student learning, on how candidates might successfully differentiate instruction, and how to apply the results of formative assessment during the lesson. These oversights adversely affect the development of strong teacher candidates.
5. Site coordinators play a vital role in the program—teaching classes, working closely with classroom mentor teachers, managing key aspects of the relationship between schools and the program, observing candidate teaching, and providing feedback about candidate performance. Inconsistent site coordinator performance and feedback quality observed during inspection led to weaker candidate teaching performance, thus limiting the ability of some candidates to advance student learning.

The quality of program performance management:  

Good (3)

1. There is good evidence from program documents and from interviews with program leaders, faculty, and school partners that program leadership regularly monitors the quality of coursework and faculty instruction as well as the quality of fieldwork and student teaching experiences. Inspection identified examples of interventions by program leadership to make changes in these areas based on evidence of the need for improvement.

2. The program regularly uses data about candidate and program performance to monitor quality. Program leadership analyses results of candidate performance assessments, Tripod K12 student surveys, and district benchmark assessment data to make informed decisions on candidate and program performance, and to ensure that candidates have a positive impact on student learning. There is a purposeful focus on strengthening data systems and making them easily accessible to administrators and faculty to drive on-going program improvement.

3. As part of the focus on candidate performance and continuous improvement, the program monitors teacher candidate performance through formal checkpoints at the end of the first semester (phase one assessment), a phase two assessment at the end of semester two, and through phase three student teaching that include TAP performance assessments, P12 student surveys, and school benchmark testing data. However, the program does not yet give sufficient attention to differentiated instruction and the use of formative assessment to modify instruction in university coursework, observation and feedback. Moreover, clearer focus on student learning in using the TAP instrument for performance assessment and candidate guidance is not yet present to foster development of candidate teaching skills and ensure that performance assessments are about student learning as well as teaching.

4. Formal partnerships between the University and its school district partners provide evidence that the program has a clear focus on school and student needs. Memoranda of understanding between the College of Education and each district partner address selection of mentors and placement of candidates as well as regular data collection through P12 student surveys and academic performance data for students taught by program candidates and graduates employed in the district.

5. Variation in the quality of site coordinators and their work affects the ability of teacher candidates to develop the knowledge and skills that will enable them to promote learning by all students in their classrooms.
Appendix: Program clinical sites and university courses

The following schools were visited to observe teaching and Texas Tech coursework, and to observe site coordinator feedback:

Centennial Elementary, Lubbock Independent School District
Cooper Central Elementary, Lubbock Cooper Independent School District
Harwell Elementary, Lubbock Independent School District
Honey Elementary, Lubbock Independent School District
McWhorter Elementary, Lubbock Independent School District
Roberts Elementary, Lubbock Independent School District
Whiteside Elementary, Lubbock Independent School District

The following Texas Tech University courses were visited or observed through video:

EDLL 3350   Children’s Literature (video)
EDEL 4000   Student Teaching Course (Centennial Elementary)
EDSP 4305   Behavior Management (video)
EDSP 3300   Exceptional Children and Youth
EDEL 4370   Teaching Mathematics
EDLL 3351   Foundations of Reading (Cooper Central Elementary)
EDLL 3352   Language and Literacy Acquisition (Cooper Central Elementary)
EDEL 4360   Teaching Social Studies
EDEL 4375   Teaching Science
EDEL 3200   Introduction to Teaching II (Assessment)
EDBL 3337   Teaching Content Areas ESL/BSL